

The
Melville Society
N E W S L E T T E R

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Accompanying this issue of the Newsletter, through the kindness of Gil Wilson, honorary member of the Society, is the announcement of an exhibition of drawings inspired by Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The exhibition was offered from May 3 to May 27, 1949, at the Arthur U. Newton Galleries in New York City. Three of the drawings are reproduced on the announcement. Both the drawings and Mr. Wilson's ideas about *Moby-Dick* will be of interest to Melville scholars. In a recent letter to the secretary, he writes as follows: "I have the firm conviction that *Moby-Dick* might very well be a catalyst for our time. In as much as Melville himself cast some of the chapters . . . in the form of a dramatic script, it seems reasonable to assume that he may have thought of his story as Greek or Shakespearean in dimensions . . . Universal the Melville is, America, more than any other nation, is obligated to make the most of his work . . . Even so, *Moby-Dick* is obviously, more than a book for America. It is a story of Man and Destruction and of Hate and Love as they relate to human survival. What more significant theme could serve as the core for a cultural effort toward One World?"

Six of Mr. Wilson's drawings for *Moby-Dick* have been reproduced in the September issue of *Pageant* magazine. The complete series of more than a hundred will be published in a book or portfolio to be ready for the *Moby-Dick* centennial in 1951. Kodachrome color slides of the drawings are available for the use of schools and colleges. A number of black and white photographs (5" x 7" and 8" x 10") have also been made.

A MELVILLE LETTER

A communication from Victor Hugo Paltsits gives information about a letter of Melville to Samuel Adams Drake. Mr. Paltsits writes as follows:

"I was sorry I had to miss the annual meeting, as I wrote you. But my absence induced by being in Coopers-town, New York, led to a discovery in casual conversation with a gentleman

of Cleveland, O., John C. Pearson, owner of a Herman Melville letter. At my request he has furnished me a photostat, which shall be turned in to the New York Public Library's Melvilleana in the Gansevoort-Lansing Collection. From New York, April 30, 1872, Herman Melville wrote to Samuel Adams Drake of Boston, who made inquiry of him about his grandfather, 'the late Major Melville of Boston,' no doubt because Drake was then preparing his *Old Landmarks of Boston*, published in 1872. He wrote: 'I am sorry that the little that is peculiar in the information I possess with regard to my grandfather the late Major Melville of Boston is but of that familiar sort hardly adapted to historical use.' He told Drake that about 'the more interesting event—his connection with the "Tea Party,"' he knew 'nothing that has not already received local mention.' He suggested that 'the sons of the late Chief Justice Shaw,' whose 'honored father was well acquainted with Major Melville,' might be interrogated; and Melville expressed to Drake his 'regret at being forced to send . . . so barren a report.' However, Drake wrote on the letter a memorandum, stating thus: 'He afterwards wrote me to address Mrs. Lucy M. Nourse, Bath, Me., only surviving (?) of Major Melville, and (widow) of Dr. Amos Nourse.' And Drake added: 'At my request the lady received an invitation to be present at the centennial of the Tea Party in Faneuil Hall.'

"It is, moreover, interesting to point out that Samuel Adams Drake's brother, Francis Samuel Drake, wrote a volume, *Tea Leaves* (1884), devoted to the Boston Tea Party. It was therefore quite right for Herman Melville to say what he did about his knowing nothing to add on that subject."

NEW YORK MEETING

A most interesting meeting of the Society was held at Columbia University in connection with the English Institute on Friday afternoon, September 9. Fifteen members were present to hear news of scholarship and pro-

ects in the field and to take part in a lively discussion. Merton M. Sealts, Jr., of Lawrence College was elected a member of the executive committee to serve until the end of 1954.

Illness prevented the attendance of two persons who had been invited to address the members. President F. Barron Freeman succeeded, however, in presenting a program of distinction. Howard P. Vincent spoke first regarding some of the criticisms which have been made of his new book, *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick*. This led quite naturally into a discussion of several theories regarding Melville's masterpiece. Professor Vincent was able to answer a number of questions relating to the Melville series now being published by Farrar, Straus-Hendricks House.

Gil Wilson, a guest of the Society, spoke about his plans for a music-drama to be called *The White Whale*, based upon *Moby-Dick*. He reported that he has written a three-act libretto and that the project is being considered for a large-scale production. (Louella Parsons in one of her columns, meanwhile, reports that the Metropolitan Opera Company is interested in the idea. She indicates that Director John Huston is prepared to make a movie of the same production which is presented at the Met. According to her account, Richard Rodgers will write the music and Oscar Hammerstein the lyrics.) After his talk, Mr. Wilson was elected an honorary member of the Society.

The secretary gave a brief report of the business affairs of the Society and asked for suggestions to improve the Newsletter. It was voted that costs of reproducing for members the Melville letters assembled by students of Gordon Roper (See Bibliographical Notes, below) be paid out of the Society's treasury. The first part of an *Index of Allusions in Melville's Works*, compiled by Tom A. Little of La Sierra College, was examined and discussed by the members present. After the meeting, the members joined the English Institute for tea.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Students of Gordon Roper, who taught this summer at the University of Chicago, assembled a collection of Melville letters in chronological order for convenience of study. The master sheets from which these were duplicated have been supplied to the secretary through the kindness of Professor Roper, and copies of the letters (without corrections) are available to members of the Society upon request and upon receipt of postage (60 cents). The collection is not intended to anticipate the work of John Birss and includes chiefly the letters which have previously been published in various places. In making a request for the letters, please indicate whether three-hole punched pages are desired.

Merlin S. Bowen, instructor at the University of Chicago, is writing a dissertation on Prometheanism in Melville's writings.

Sidney Kaplan of the University of Massachusetts kindly reports the shortest version of *Typee* on record. It is a diminutive pocket book published in England during the war as Gulliver Little Books No. 27, and entitled *Selections from Typee*.

F. Barron Freeman brings to our attention a notice in *Variety* announcing a new dramatic version of *Billy Budd* to be presented in England. The volume and page references are not available at this writing. The secretary will deeply appreciate their being sent in by any member who has them. It is also reported that *Billy Budd* will be made into a movie.

Tyrus Hillway has completed a dramatic version of *Moby-Dick* in four acts entitled *Captain Ahab*. He has tried to preserve Melville's language and the plot as Melville intended it. A preface is included. No plans for publication can be announced at present.

Pocket Books of New York City has published this year to sell for twenty-five cents, an abridged version of *Moby-Dick*, edited with an introduction by Maxwell Geismar.

THE *Melville Society* NEWSLETTER

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for the members of the Melville Society, a group of scholars and other persons interested in the life and works of Herman

Melville. The Society seeks to facilitate the exchange of informa-

tion among its members, to stimulate the study of Melville's life

and works, and to contribute toward the improvement of the

facilities for literary, historical, and bibliographical research.

Membership (including subscription to the Newsletter) may be

secured through payment of one dollar annually to the Secretary,

Tyrus Hillway, 423 Pequot Avenue, New London, Connecticut.